

## **H.R. 952 The COMBAT Act**

Introduced by Rep. John Hall

Chair, Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs

Committee on Veterans Affairs

H.R. 952 will lower the burdensome threshold that veterans have to meet to receive compensation for injuries incurred in service, namely PTSD. It will help clear the enormous VA disability claims backlog that is significantly delaying or denying benefit payments to veterans for their disabilities.

- As it currently stands, veterans have to “prove” the stressor that caused their injuries, even if they have already been medically linked to service. They need to track down incident reports, buddy statements, present medals, and leap other hurdles to meet the threshold that VA mandates in order to receive desperately needed compensation for injuries incurred during service.
- In the Iraq and Afghanistan wars alone, more than 100,000 veterans have been diagnosed with PTSD. However, only 42,000 have been granted service-connected disability for their condition. This is true for past conflicts as well. The disability claims backlog at the VA is approaching 1 million, a great many of which are Vietnam Veterans seeking compensation for PTSD.
- HR 952 would expand the definition of ‘combat with the enemy’ in Title 38, USC to include active service in a theater of combat. This would essentially establish service in a combat theater as the presumptive stressor for the incurrence of PTSD and other service related injuries. The veteran would still need to be clinically diagnosed with these injuries and it would still need to be linked with service; however, he or she would no longer need to “prove” the events that caused this diagnosis.
- H.R. 952 does **not** create a new benefit, nor does it presume that anyone who serves in the military has PTSD or other disabilities. What it does is give veterans who served in a war zone the benefit of the doubt that they indeed were exposed to stressors that caused PTSD rather than making them cite a specific incident that caused their condition – especially since they’ve already been diagnosed.
- The bill is nearly universally supported by veterans of all political persuasions, Republicans and Democrats alike. H.R. 952 has been endorsed by the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), The American Legion, Veterans for Common Sense (VCS), National Legal Veterans Services Program (NLVSP), Ex Prisoners of War (Ex-POW), Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Fleet Reserve Association (FRA), Veterans & Military Families for Progress, Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)
- Many vets have lost faith in their government and elected officials because of the hoops they have to jump through at the VA as well as the assumption in the current policy that they are scamming the system. H.R. 952 helps restore some of that trust. It’s more than just the right thing to do for vets.
- The issue is cost: CBO estimates H.R. 952 to cost \$4.7 billion over 10 years. While this may seem expensive, a RAND study has determined that the cost of untreated PTSD to our nation could total \$6.2 billion over two years.